

Governor Barbour: Major Law Enforcement Initiative Targets ‘Worst of the Worst’

Focus on violent drug, gun offenders in Hinds County

(JACKSON, Mississippi) –Governor Haley Barbour today announced a major new law enforcement initiative targeting “the worst of the worst” felony drug and violent gun offenders in Hinds County and Jackson.

“The first purpose of state law enforcement is to support local law enforcement. This initiative will help the Hinds County Sheriff’s Department and the City of Jackson’s Police Department fight crime by providing new support to all parts of the criminal justice system,” Governor Barbour said. “Every citizen of our state has an interest in having a safe and secure Capital City. By working together, this initiative will bring new resources in identifying, prosecuting, convicting, and removing the worst criminal offenders from the streets of Jackson.”

The \$3.5 million, two-year initiative will provide funding for a full-time-equivalent special Circuit Court judge, two new assistant district attorneys, one new public defender, and additional support staff. This initiative will also fund an investigations team comprised of law enforcement officers from the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, the Mississippi Department of Corrections, the Jackson Police Department, and the Hinds County Sheriff’s Department. This effort will be coordinated with federal agencies, including the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“I appreciate the Governor’s support on fighting crime in Hinds County. The Governor has kept his commitment and the two assistant district attorneys will be a tremendous help,” said incoming Hinds County District Attorney Robert Shuler Smith, who was sworn in today.

“I am very pleased with the Governor and his staff for providing the metro area with this much-needed assistance,” said Jackson Mayor Frank Melton.

Governor Barbour dedicated funding from federal law enforcement grants made available after Hurricane Katrina to this initiative. This initiative will not require an additional appropriation by the State Legislature.

This new initiative also complements laws proposed by Governor Barbour and enacted by the 2007 Legislature to toughen penalties against felons having guns or using them in commission of a crime. One of the new laws increased the statutory maximum penalty to up to 10 years for previously convicted felons found in possession of a firearm. The old statutory maximum sentence was up to three years. Another new law increased the statutory penalty to 10 years for a previously convicted felon who uses a firearm during the commission of any felony.

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